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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - ERIC BARBORIAK  
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage May 16 on alleged involvement by President Chen Shui-bian's son-in-law in insider trading, a press conference called by the suspended chairman of the Financial Supervisory Commission in an attempt to clear his name, and other local political issues. Most papers reported on inside pages remarks President Chen made when receiving former U.S. National Security Council Senior Director for Asian Affairs Michael Green on Monday; Chen said the transit incident is over and that it will not affect future Taiwan-U.S. relations. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a banner-headline news story on page two that said the United States will restore diplomatic ties with Libya, followed by a Presidential Office announcement that Taiwan will develop comprehensive trade and economic relations with Libya.

¶2. One Chinese-language paper and three English-language papers editorialized on President Chen's recent trip to Latin America and on Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's remarks at a congressional hearing last Wednesday. A "Liberty Times" editorial criticized Zoellick and said it is unwise for U.S. cross-strait policy to dance to China's tune. DPP Legislator Lin Cho-shui opined in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" that Washington's transit ploy was aimed at Chen. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" said Chen's trip will be remembered as the beginning of Taiwan's adoption of an autonomous, mature diplomacy which does not first look to Washington for guidance or to Beijing to see what Taiwan should oppose. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post," on the other hand, said a "U.S.-China united front against Taiwan independence is in force already." End summary.

A) "It Is Unwise for U.S. Cross-Strait Policy to Dance to China's Tune"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (5/16):

"... Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, during a recent congressional hearing, corrected a U.S. congressman for referring to Taiwan as a country. Zoellick emphasized that Taiwan is an economy, and he added: The precondition for [President Chen Shui-bian's] five no's pledge is that China has no intention to use force against Taiwan, and China indeed hasn't used force against the island. Judging from Zoellick's relevant remarks, it is not difficult to see that to maintain its sovereignty, Taiwan must bear in mind the phrase that 'God helps those who help themselves.' ...

"... When China proactively applied its united-front tactics on the pan-Blue leadership, American officials often urged China publicly to engage in a dialogue with Taiwan's elected leaders. Such a call

does make sense, but the United States itself does not practice what it preaches. Under China's brutal interference, Washington always ignores Taiwan's elected leader. Don't these American officials know that the arrangements that overlooked President Chen's dignity would hurt Taiwan people's feelings? ...

"The primary spirit of the 'Taiwan Relations Act' is to underscore Taiwan's democratic and strategic values. The 'one China policy' defined by the United States must be combined with the 'Taiwan Relations Act' in order to achieve a constructive balance. If people follow what some American officials prescribe and bow to the 'one China principle' as defined by China, it will not only jeopardize Taiwan's national interests but will also harm the United States' national interests, or even cause other allies' trust in the United States to waver. ... Under such circumstances, if Washington's cross-Straits policy dances to the Chinese tune and makes Taiwan people mistakenly believe that the United States fails to practice what it preaches, democratic values will lose their luster in Taiwan. If Taiwan's democracy regresses and thereby offers more room for China's united-front tactics, it will be more difficult for the United States to fix the strategic imbalance that might take shape in the future."

B) "US Transit Ploy Was Aimed at Chen"

DPP Legislator Lin Cho-shui opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (5/16):

"... In addition, this [transit] incident has highlighted the difficult situation that independence fundamentalists are in. Chen met their demands and, after the cessation of the National Unification Council and its guidelines, DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun initiated a call for constitutional re-engineering and a change to the nation's title in an attempt to achieve de jure independence. Unexpectedly, however, the US' reaction means that we are now even further away from internationally recognized de jure independence. ..."

C) "Taiwan's Diplomacy Begins to Grow up"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (5/16):

"The nine-day and 33,000-mile 'journey of peace and sustainability and of consolidating friendship' completed by President Chen Shui-bian and his entourage Friday will be remembered as the beginning of Taiwan's adoption of an autonomous and mature diplomacy and not as a 'flight to nowhere' as charged by critics in the conservative opposition camp and our myopic mainstream media. Besides upholding our national dignity, the greatest lasting legacy of President Chen's journey is the realization that a democratic Taiwan can and must conduct its own foreign policy without first looking to Washington for guidance or to Beijing to see what we should oppose. ...

"Washington's exercise in 'real politics' thus turned out to be somewhat of a blessing in disguise. It provided a stronger impetus for President Chen and the foreign ministry to finally take the plunge and enter diplomatic adulthood by showing the resolve to make our own decisions based on our own interests and values and to take responsibility for those decisions. ... Hence, any display of autonomy by Taiwan or open expression of differences with Washington does not signify the 'bankruptcy' of U.S.-Taiwan relations, nor is it necessary that Taiwan must at all times and on all occasions oppose everything done or advocated by the PRC. ..."

D) "Chen Shaking Status Quo"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/16):

"President Chen Shui-bian's recent theatric nine-day trip to seven nations, four more than originally planned, was an act of impulse, unbecoming of a prudent leader. ... The United States, the main architect of Taiwan's past, present and, certainly, future, was both the cause and target of President Chen's unorthodox journey of 'upholding Taiwan's dignity.' Refuting both Washington and Beijing's one-China principle, Chen stressed that 'Taiwan is an independent state, not a part of China.' ...

"Explaining the U.S. rejection of Chen's wish to visit prominent cities on America proper, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick told a congressional hearing last week that Chen testing the U.S. one China policy under which the U.S. switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979. Chen was 'hitting into a wall,' Zoellick said. ... And for the first time, Stephen Young, director of the American Institute in Taiwan, said at a business association luncheon last week that 'the U.S. opposes Taiwan independence,' instead of the usual 'no support' for it. These unprecedented straightforward U.S. policy statements are not enough to deter Chen's independence legacy to assure political relevance after he leaves office in 2008.

"Chen's quixotic attempt to challenge U.S. policies only deepens U.S. distrust of him and his administration. Fortunately, U.S. goodwill toward Taiwan remains intact as Washington has repeatedly assured afterwards. The drama has stirred little public response from Beijing, except making ritual protests to Tripoli and Jakarta for allowing Chen's jet to land. A U.S.-China united front against Taiwan independence is in force already."

YOUNG